

# HB 2325 Social Media Use During and After Disasters

State of Texas

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# Authority

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Texas House Bill 2325 was filed by Representative Will Metcalf (primary author) on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 during the 86<sup>th</sup> regular legislative session.

Governor Abbott signed House Bill 2325 on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

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## **For more information:**

Texas Legislature Online

<https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=86R&Bill=HB2325>

## Overview

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### **Texas Govt. Code 418.055.**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA USE DURING AND AFTER DISASTERS.**

The division, in consultation with any state agency or private entity the division determines is appropriate, shall develop standards for the use of social media as a communication tool by governmental entities during and after a disaster.

The standards must:

- (1) require state agencies, political subdivisions, first responders, and volunteers that use social media during and after a disaster to post consistent and clear information;
- (2) optimize the effectiveness of social media use during and after a disaster;
- (3) and require that certain official social media accounts be used during and after a disaster only for providing credible sources of information.

## Steps to Development

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The Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) hosted (3) meetings with Texas Emergency Management Council agency communication teams at the State Operations Center (5805 North Lamar, Austin, Texas 78752) to develop initial HB 2325 social media standards. The workgroup meetings took place during the following days and times:

- Meeting #1, Friday, October 18th, 2019 (10:00 AM- 12:00 PM)
- Meeting #2 Friday, November 8th, 2019 (1:00 PM- 3:00 PM)
- Meeting #3 Friday, December 13th, 2019 (10:00 AM- 12:30 PM)

In an effort to better understand the tools available to government agencies when messaging on social media during and after disasters, Twitter and Facebook representatives presented to the workgroup on the following days:

- Twitter, Friday, November 8th, 2019 (1:00 PM- 3:00 PM)
- Facebook, December 13th, 2019 (10:00 AM- 12:30 PM)

## Social Media Standards

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**(1) ensure state agencies, political subdivisions, first responders, and volunteers that use social media during and after a disaster to post consistent and clear information;**

- Simple language, correct grammar (3rd grade reading level).
- Maintain neutral voice, unemotional messaging throughout incident.
- Provide direct safety instructions, condensed, to the point.
- Echo lead agency messaging, don't go rogue.
- Translate all critical messaging for non-english speaking communities affected by event.
- Ensure information that is posted is accessible to people with disabilities.

**(2) optimize the effectiveness of social media use during and after a disaster;**

- Prior to disaster days, establish accounts on popular social media platforms and become familiar with the online culture by sustaining an active presence. Monitor online activity and become familiar with commonly used hashtags and abbreviations. For example, twitter users frequently localize hashtags by using the two-letter state abbreviations or three letter airport code, followed by a hazard specific abbreviation, such as #txwx for a Texas weather tweet or #txeq for Texas earthquake.
- Decide which members will be responsible for maintaining social media accounts, responding to questions and comments, and act as the admin.
- Tailor message for each social media platform (Twitter vs Facebook vs LinkedIn).
- Utilize app specific features to bolster the credibility of information that is posted. In Twitter, this is possible with Twitter Moments and Twitter Lists.
- Create a hashtag for the event OR find out if the hashtag the public created is widely recognized and easily adoptable.
- Disperse same message across all agency communication platforms simultaneously.

- Maintain public attention and set realistic expectations by providing schedule of future updates.
- Embed videos into posts to avoid diverting attention through links.
- Utilize Twitter/Facebook messaging tools available to government agencies during incidents.
- If possible, brand social media content with known agency seals or graphics, to verify that information is credible and coming directly from agency.
- Engage in 1-or 2-way communication with others by responding to questions and comments and providing clarification. This will help to avoid or minimize resource and information conflicts.
- If your organization's Facebook page becomes monopolized by comments or posts from the public, with inaccurate information, consider creating a policy in your info section about how comments or users will be handled if there is a continued public misuse of the page.
- Quickly correct any misconceptions or inaccurate rumors with credible facts.
- Follow relevant hashtags in order to build and maintain awareness on community discussions. For example, if there is a tornado warning in Austin, create a search for "tornado" and "Austin" in order to provide information and answer questions.
- Set up a search for your organization's name and Twitter handle so that you can see what the public is saying directly to or about your organization.
- All social media posts should reflect the stage of disaster that your organization is in. For example, "blue-sky" periods are great opportunities to engage with your online community and create an online presence that will prove to be helpful during disaster days. Blue sky posts should provide information and resources around day-to-day activities. Common blue-sky topics include the following:
  - highlighting or thanking local heroes, partners, or volunteers
  - discussing upcoming local events
  - sharing helpful preparedness tips and information

- Disaster days posts should be effective, accurate, compassionate and timely. Common disaster-day topics include:
  - how and where people can go to get help
  - what people can do to stay safe
  - clarification of information and rumors
- During disaster, provide accurate and clear information, and be sure to clarify and correct misinformation. If correcting or updating information that your organization has previously posted, it is a good practice to start a post with "UPDATED:" and then clarify or expand upon previous post to avoid misinformation.
- During disaster, repeat critical information frequently. This helps to keep the information appearing at the top of users' feeds and avoids posts getting buried.
- Ensure your organization's network infrastructure is robust and able to handle peak demands during disasters.
- Make sure that you have prepared messages for all hazards that require only event specific information to be added and then sent out. Developing some predefined hashtags and keywords to use for a type of hazard can be useful.

**(3) require that official social media accounts be used during and after a disaster only for providing credible sources of information.**

- Identify lead responding federal agency (if applicable), supporting state agency, and affected local jurisdiction for credible source information.
- Engage with the public in a purely factual way, do not engage in conversations based in opinions or politics.

These social media standards will serve Texas Emergency Management Council agencies and partners utilizing social media to communicate disaster messaging. Through ongoing meetings with emergency management council agency communications teams, local public information officers, elected officials, researchers/academics, and social media companies, these standards will be updated to reflect the latest best practices and emerging technology uses moving forward.



## **Development and Implementation Timeline**

<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Team Assignments</b>	<b>Status</b>
10/9	Final draft to Chief Kidd	Chief Kidd	Complete
Ongoing	Recurring meetings with Texas Emergency Management Council agency communications teams, local public information officers, media, mayors, county judges, legislators and researchers about the best standards, practices and tools for social media.	TDEM Media & Communications	Ongoing
Ongoing	Presentations with representatives from social media platforms, to ensure the most up to date tools are being utilized.	TDEM Media & Communications	Ongoing

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